

## Abandoned Pedestal Project

### Proposition Statement:

In New York City, there are pedestals now devoid of sculpture for which they were designed. The only thing left of these sculptural complexes are the classical bases.

A classical pedestal can be devoid of its sculpture for a variety of reasons. The work could be in the process of being restored, in storage, on loan, or vandalized. The precise set of circumstances that led to this abandonment, or simple vacancy, may through research reveal much about the history of a community which is currently being ignored or suppressed.

This current situation presents powerful points of departure for the creation of new temporary works on predesignated art spaces. The involvement of contemporary artists in the re-activation of these sites will lead to renewed public awareness and timely dialogue, possibly inciting renovation of the site and its surroundings.

Marc Blane  
New York, 11/89

Jacob H. Schiff Fountain

(a specific example of this concept)

## Jacob Schiff - - Biography

Jacob Henry Schiff (1847-1920), scion of a prominent Jewish family, was born in Frankfort, Germany. At age eighteen, Schiff emigrated to the United States and founded a brokerage house. At thirty-eight, he became chief executive officer of Kuhn, Loeb & Company. Schiff financed the Pennsylvania, Baltimore & Ohio, Great Northern and Union Pacific Railroads, Western Union, Westinghouse, United States Rubber, and American Telephone and Telegraph. In 1905, Schiff floated a \$200,000,000 war bond that helped Japan defeat Russia. He played a key role in founding The American Jewish Committee, Jewish Theological Seminary, Yeshiva University, Hebrew Union College, Jewish Publication Society, the Jewish Division of the New York Public Library and the Semitic Museum at Harvard University. His immense wealth and extensive political and philanthropic interests enabled Jacob Schiff to influence a succession of N.Y. Mayors and U.S. Presidents. A ceremonial fountain was installed in Seward Park in 1895 to honor him for helping Russian Jews adapt to their new life in America.

Past

Jacob H. Schiff Fountain - 1895

Location: Seward Park

Essex and Canal Streets

New York, New York

Architect: Arnold W. Brunner

Description: Ornamental fountain, large basin 15ft. x 3ft., from center of which rises a column supporting two bronze basins, one above the other. Semi-circular seats on two sides about 25ft. long. All dark grey granite except the two basins.

Inscription: "And There Shall Come Water Out Of It, That The People May Drink."

Exodus 17:6

Photograph: The Jacob H. Schiff Fountain, 1895.







### Present

The upper bronze basin and most of the bronze detail has been removed from this fountain. One of the inescapable realities of Urban life and particularly any public arts program is decay. Nothing so dramatically illustrates this fact than the current condition of the Schiff Fountain. Engaging artists and the public with new temporary installations would focus thought and dialogue on this issue and possible solutions.

Photograph:        Remains of the Jacob H. Schiff Fountain, 1984.







## Empty Pedestals project proposal

Rosalyn Deutsche writes in her essay *Uneven development: Public Art in New York City*, "...today there is no document of New York's ascendancy which is not *at the same time* a document of homelessness."<sup>1</sup> The Empty Pedestals project is an interesting opportunity to consider this notion because these neglected sites are similarly documents of attention, and funding, focused elsewhere. Both displaced or misplaced individuals and disfunctional monuments result from policies of benign neglect, or deliberate de-stabilisation of urban zones, aimed eventually at some form of "ascendancy." Accordingly, the task seems to be neither to reclaim the lost splendor of these empty pedestals nor to wallow in their downfall, but to reflect upon the middle ground - diverse forces functioning between these two states.

My proposal, to be exhibited at Storefront in model form, is for a temporary installation of densified, recycled, aluminum can "biscuits" to fill the Crotona Park fountain to its original water level. The main basin of the fountain would then be filled with water just sufficient to cover the level surface of the compressed aluminum cans. This thin layer of water would transform the Crotona fountain into a reflecting pool in which the submerged cans would mimic pocket change tossed into such pools in the hope of realizing wishes. In The semi-circular outer pools, the compressed aluminum would create a surface upon which one could walk.

The highly compressed aluminum can "biscuits," each 14"x14"x7" and weighing about 16 pounds, would be obtained locally if possible and would reflect local aluminum prices. At \$.50/lb, the approximate value of aluminum used would be \$4,750; perhaps substantially more based upon New York's container deposit value rather than aluminum market prices.

I draw upon my experiences within the recycling industry in Chicago, in particular the commerce of scavenged materials, in formulating my proposal. This commerce has become increasingly significant to low income groups and declining neighborhoods. Its meager income prevents, for many who "hustle cans," a slide further into destitution. This under-developed utility contrasts sharply with the cans primary role as brightly colored blips of convenient packaging in a sophisticated, media-based industry.

Based upon past experience, the biscuits are a very paradoxical "sculptural" element. A large public installation of compressed aluminum invites simultaneous readings as a portrait of mass consumption, a disjunctive, estheticized, tactile experience, and an economically charged record of collective labor, among others. The cans echo their own uneven development, sustaining a puzzling combination of socially beneficial behavior and exploitation. Take for example, an ad-hoc underpaid labor force generating profits for container corporations while coincidentally averting reusable resources from landfills.

This proposal represents a vulnerable spectacle. It seeks an equilibrium between its identity as "art," and as medium of exchange; an equilibrium between sanctity and theft. Some of the biscuits would be bound to disappear during the course of this project based on the identification of cans with currency. While this is neither the goal of the project nor a reason for not doing it, it reflects the conditions by which this material functions in the contemporary urban setting, its relation to ascendancy and homelessness, so to speak, and forces the project to adapt itself accordingly to exist within these conditions. Further, it is important that this installation be temporary, and that the material be seen as *detoured* from its pathway as recyclable matter, not permanently disengaged from it.

1. Roslyn Deutsche, "Uneven Development: Public Art in New York City", *October* 47, p 5.



*Aluminum Can Biscuit*, 1989  
300 aluminum cans, 16 lbs., 14' x 14' x 7'  
photo: Daniel Peterman



## WAR MEMORIAL OIL TOWER

Steve Greene, April, 1991

My proposal for the Crotona Park Fountain is a commemorative tower for all those who have died or who continue to suffer as a result of conflicts in the Persian Gulf. The South Bronx is an appropriate site for such a memorial, because poorer communities such as this one contributed a substantial number of service men and women to the U.S. forces that were sent to the war. After World War I, the small section of the park where the fountain sits was called Victory Park, and it is fitting that while Americans are celebrating their recent victory, this spot should serve as a reminder that for millions of people, the war has not yet ended.

The tower would be constructed over the fountain, from materials found in the vacant lots and abandoned or demolished buildings in the area. This quality of the phoenix is one that is shared by survivors of blighted communities such as this one, and survivors of wars. The yellow floral design encircling the oil tank is taken from the back of the twenty dollar bill, and in this abstracted multiple setting resembles a Middle Eastern decorative design. The fountain, now filled with dirt and used as a planter, would be emptied and used as an oil receptacle. Park visitors would be encouraged to dump oil drained from automobiles and other motors into the fountain as a commemorative act. Oil would be pumped from the pool, through a pipe and into the tank, and would drip back into the pool.

Crotona Park Fountain  
Steve Greene



EMPTY PEDESTALS PROJECT  
STOREFRONT FOR ART & ARCHITECTURE

**PROTECTIVE FENCE FOR GRIEG PEDESTAL**  
**Prospect Park, Brooklyn, New York**

Mike Metz

**Bar & Grill (musical note), 1991**

Welded and forged steel

maquette for site sculpture

model by Anthony Tung

**STOREFRONT FOR ARCHITECTURE**  
November 7, 1989

**MARC BLANE PROJECT / Reuse of Abandoned Pedestals**

**Proposal by: Mike Metz**

**Reuse of the Neptune Fountain Pedestal  
at the Snug Harbor Cultural Arts Center  
Staten Island, N. Y.**

**Sailors' Snug Harbor**

Sailors' Snug Harbor opened in August 1833 and closed in 1976 to become the Snug Harbor Cultural Arts Center. It was America's first and most famous home for retired or homeless seamen.

The 1801 will of Robert Randall, son of the patriot merchant sea captain Thomas Randall, directed that his assets be used to "erect... upon some eligible part of the land upon which I now reside, an Asylum, or Marine Hospital, to be called 'Sailors' Snug Harbor' for the purpose of maintaining and supporting aged, decrepit and worn-out sailors."

Sailors of any rank or nationality, naval or merchant seamen who had worked "before the mast", not on ships with engines, were all equally eligible to become residents of the new community.

I have estimated that as many as 21,000 sailors' resided at Sailors' Snug Harbor during its 143 year existence.

**The Neptune Fountain**

Neptune Fountain, cast 1892 (see photographs #1 #2 #3)  
by J.W. Fiske & Company, fabricator  
Material: sculpture, zinc; pedestal, sandstone

The Neptune fountain was conceived as a major compositional element when the area was landscaped in the 1890's

The fountain, described as among the finest well-preserved zinc sculptures in existence, has fallen prey to vandalism and pollution and is now in storage on the grounds at the Snug Harbor Cultural Arts Center awaiting funds for restoration. The total cost of restoration of the Neptune Fountain is estimated at \$150,000.



**Proposed Reuse of Abandoned Pedestal for the Neptune Fountain:** To act as a commemorative for the 143 years that Snug Harbor functioned as a retirement home for homeless, indigent sailors; giving them security, shelter, new life and introspective exploration.

An object has been created which suggests (at the same time) an anchor, umbrella, semen, and sailboat (see photograph #4).

[anchor security, umbrella shelter, semen new life, sailboat introspective exploration]

One of these anchor / umbrella / semen / sailboat objects will be cast for each of the 143 years that the original Sailors' Snug Harbor was in existence. Each of these objects will be individually made and cast solid using the various metals that were shipped to this country on sailing ships during the days of Sailors' Snug Harbor. This will include metals such as: aluminum, brass, bronze, copper, iron, lead, steel, tin, and zinc.

Each anchor / umbrella / semen / sailboat object will be connected by a length of chain with one link for each sailor that resided at Sailors' Snug Harbor. This should amount to a total of 21,000 links, and a total chain length of 2,145 ft. That is 180 links between each anchor / umbrella / semen / sailboat, the length of chain between each object will be 15 ft.

The 143 objects and 2,143 feet of chain will be stacked up on the pedestal mimicking the basic shape of the Neptune Fountain. (see photographs #5 #6).

Snug Harbor Cultural Arts Center may auction off anchor / umbrella / semen / sailboat objects and 15 feet of chain for \$1,000 each with proceeds going towards the restoration and renovation of the Neptune Sculpture Fountain (see photographs #7 #8)

#### **Expenses**

143 anchor / umbrella / semen / sailboat objects (approximately \$120.00 each.)	\$17,160.00
2,143 feet of chain	\$775.00
Installation	\$250.00
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Total	\$18,185.00



#1 Neptune Fountain, cast 1892  
by J. W. Fiske & Company, fabricator  
Material: sculpture, zinc; pedestal, sandstone





#2 Neptune Fountain, cast 1892  
by J.W. Fiske & Company, fabricator  
Material: sculpture, zinc; pedestal, sandstone





#3 Neptune Fountain, cast 1892  
by J.W. Fiske & Company, fabricator



UMBRELLA

SEMEN

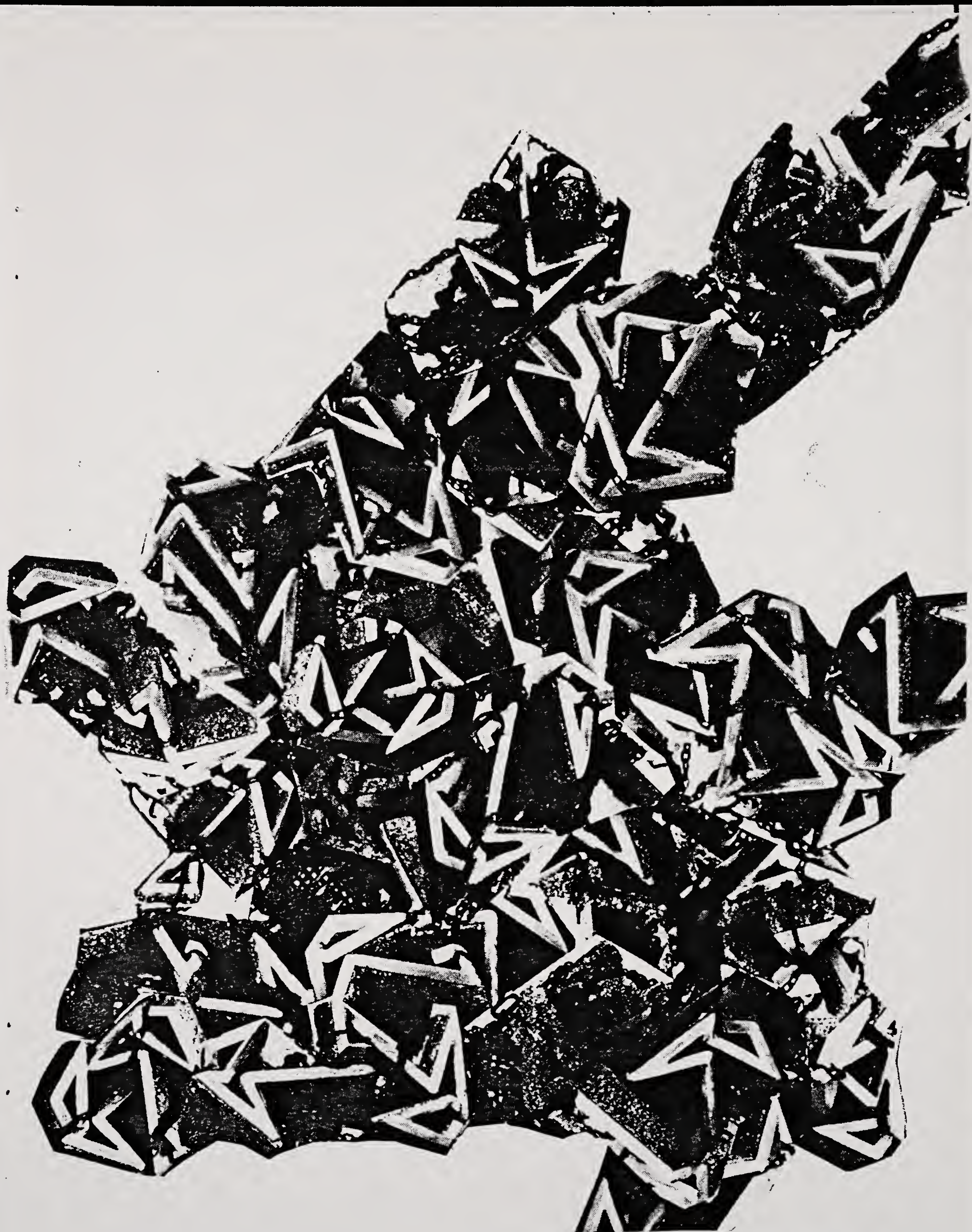
ANCHOR

SAILBOAT



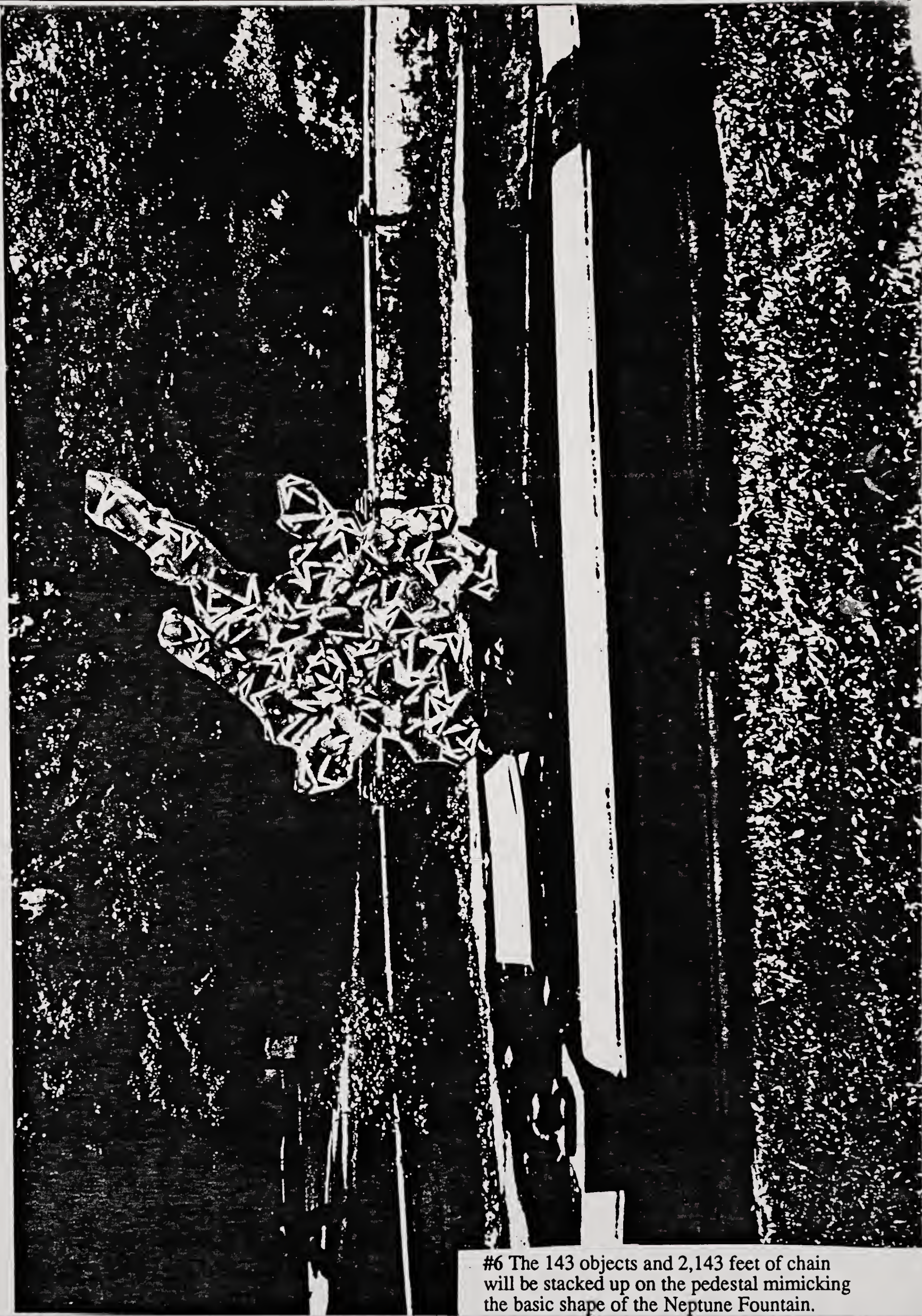
#4 An object has been created which suggests an anchor, umbrella, semen, and sailboat.





#5 The 143 objects and 2,143 feet of chain will be stacked up on the pedestal mimicking the basic shape of the Neptune Fountain.





#6 The 143 objects and 2,143 feet of chain will be stacked up on the pedestal mimicking the basic shape of the Neptune Fountain.





#7 Snug Harbor Cultural Arts Center may auction off anchor / umbrella / semen / sailboat objects and 15 feet of chain for \$1,000 each with proceeds going towards the restoration and renovation of the Neptune Sculpture Fountain.